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Woman injured by tiger at G. W. Exotic Animal Park

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By: Jon Miller, Assignment Editor - [email](#)

By: Jordann Lucero, Primetime Reporter - [bio](#) | [email](#)

The G. W. Exotic Animal Park reports a woman employee was attacked Saturday morning by a tiger. The park said the woman's arm was seriously injured, but doctors are hopeful for a good recovery.

"It was probably one of the most shocking things I've ever seen in my life and that was one of my employees laying there with half an arm," the park's tiger owner Joe Schreibvogel said.

Schreibvogel said the woman violated protocol by putting her hand into the tiger's cage. She was wearing a goose down jacket that became bunched.

"When her jacket and glove got stuck in the cage, the tiger beat her to the fence," he said. "The only thing I can attribute it to is the fluffiness and maybe the sound of a goose down jacket inside his cage that aroused him to be a toy."

No one is supposed to put any part of their body in a cage, Schreibvogel said. He said getting inside a cage is cause for firing.

"We can only train you so much and then it's going to be your responsibility to use that training," he said.

Schreibvogel said this was not the tiger's fault and said the employee blamed herself for the attack.

The Oklahoma director of the Humane Society of the U.S. said she is not surprised by the accident.

"GW Exotic Park has a history of safety and animal welfare issues going back many years," Cynthia Armstrong said.

Armstrong called for action to regulate access to the animals at the park.

"They are not a legitimate or professionally run operation. They don't have the appropriate accreditation, they don't have a technical staff that knows what they're doing," she said.

Schreibvogel said the park is the only hope for each animal it cares for. He said this was the first major incident in the park's history.

"We assume the risk when we work with these animals. We have the right to assume the risk when we work with these animals," he said.

The park is home to more than 150 big cats. The tiger involved in the attack is only known as "Tiger #7." It is about 14-years-old and has been at the park for about four years. Schreibvogel said it has never shown any aggression.

The animal will not be put down, but it has been moved to an area of the park not accessible to the public.

The woman was transported to a hospital in Pauls Valley then medi-flighted to OU Medical Center in Oklahoma City where she underwent surgery.

The woman's name will not be released until her family is notified.

The park will submit a case report to the USDA. It is protocol for the USDA to investigate in cases like this. That investigation will be delayed as the agency has been closed due to the government shutdown.

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